



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on  
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

## Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

### Third Sunday of Advent A



Landscape with St. John the Baptist preaching. Painting by Pieter Bruegel the Younger. Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn. Similar composition to the one by Pieter Bruegel the Elder in Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 1601



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2. **Blessing of an Advent Wreath**

Before your group lights the first candle of the Advent wreath, the following blessing may be prayed.

Leader: The kingdom of God is at hand.

All respond: Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Leader: Let us call to mind God's mercy and salvation as we wait in hope during the days and weeks of Advent. As we gather around this wreath let us remember God's promise to be with us until the end of time.

*Scripture is read. Isaiah 9: 1-2a.*

*All respond: Thanks be to God.*

*After a time of silence, all join in prayers of intercessions and in the Lord's Prayer.*

Leader: Let us ask God to bless our wreath and to bless us.

*After a short silence, the leader prays:*

Heavenly Father,

We praise and thank you for the great gift of your Son Jesus, the Christ.

You sent him as a Light to the nations.

You sent him to reveal your Light and Love to a world darkened by sin.

Christ is our hope and our salvation.

Upon him we place all our trust.

He is Emmanuel, the promised Messiah.

He brings wisdom and peace to a troubled world.

Lord God,

bless this wreath and

bless those who gaze upon its light in hopeful anticipation.

Come, Lord Jesus, come in haste, come!

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

*The third candle is lighted.*

Leader: Let us praise God, the ruler of the universe.

*All respond, making the sign of the cross:*

The God who made heaven and earth!

*The blessing concludes with a verse from "O Come O Come, Emmanuel"*

## Liturgical Context

- ▶ Advent is a time not just of expectant waiting but of profound renewal.
- ▶ The cosmos joins the cries of human longing for the Christ—the One who came once in history, who comes each week in our hearts and who will come again at the end of time.
- ▶ There is a reminder of the judgment that awaits us all throughout the entire season.
- ▶ The symbolism of the Advent wreath reminds us of the tension between light and darkness. We are reminded of the darkness the earth once knew as it waited for the coming of the Light of the World—the Christ. A candle is lit each week illustrating the gradual increase of the Light that dispels the darkness.
- ▶ The Advent wreath cradles our primary symbols--wood and light. “The wood refers to the ‘living greens’ that are used to make the wreath...The wood or pine embodies the primary symbol of the cross. It is the wood of the cross which will become the sign of our salvation at Easter whereby all are saved by the ‘wood of the cross’. The four candles represent Christ, the Light of the World!”<sup>1</sup> Four purple candles, or three purple candles and one rose candle [for Gaudete Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent], or four white candles may be used in the wreath.
- ▶ The Third Sunday of Advent is also referred to as Gaudete Sunday. *Gaudete* means *rejoice*. The entrance antiphon for today’s liturgy hearkens back to the prophet Isaiah’s expectant joy: “The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom”. At this point in Advent, our anticipatory joy also increases. Even though repentance is still a primary theme and hues of penitential purples still can be seen, Advent speaks to us of expectant joy.
- ▶ John is the prophet who explodes onto the scene during Advent and Lent in the readings as the one who exhorts us to repent and our need for God’s forgiveness and redemption. John is a symbol of the preaching ministry and reminds us that we are all called to preach the living word of God. John is the prophet who heralds the Savior and reminds us of our appointed task in this day and age. We too are to herald the Christ in our everyday lives.
- ▶ Mary slowly emerges as a primary character in the unfolding drama of the season.
- ▶ Today particularly John the Baptist takes center stage as a primary player in the ethos of the season. One can almost hear his ancient cry, “Repent and change your lives!”
- ▶ We are reminded that the new liturgical year (Year A) that began on the First Sunday of Advent echoes the

Catholic  
**Faith, Life  
& Creed**  
Version 2.0

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Breaking Open the  
Word worksheets  
connect with *Catholic  
Faith, Life, & Creed*  
Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by  
TeamRCIA.com and  
PastoralPlanning.com.

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<sup>1</sup>Linda Gaupin, *Catechesis and Liturgy, Course Text. 52.*

voice of St. Matthew. Matthew's audience was primarily a middle-class, Jewish Christian audience. He uses scriptural images, stories and themes familiar to a Jewish community to relate the Christ event.

- ▶ We are reminded of the importance of the liturgical year. We are reminded that the entire mystery of Christ is made manifest to us in the liturgical year and that the primary truths of Christian faith are manifested throughout the seasons.
- ▶ Advent prepares us to encounter the truth, reality and dogma of the Incarnation that we will experience at Christmas.
- ▶ We remember three comings of Christ—the Christ who came once in history, the Christ who comes each day in our hearts and the Christ who will come at the end of time.
- ▶ Salvation history is remembered and made present to us in our Advent liturgies.
- ▶ The season invites prayerful diligence as we remember what God has accomplished through his Son Jesus throughout human history, what he is doing now and what he will continue to do in our lives as we go about the business of building his kingdom on earth as we wait in joyful hope for the kingdom yet to come.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

## Reading 1: Isaiah 35: 1-6a, 10

- ▶ Today's reading narrates Israel's return from Babylonian exile by hearkening back to an earlier return from exile in Egypt in the Exodus event. This section of Isaiah is believed to have been written by the author of second Isaiah (chapters 40- ) and inserted into the first section of the book (ch. 1-39).
- ▶ In this pericope Isaiah insists that the desert will blossom and all will return to Israel just as those things occurred for their ancestors.
- ▶ The prophet strengthens the people with words of hope in the face of despair.
- ▶ The return of the exiles will be accompanied by signs. The blind will see, the deaf will hear and the lame will walk. God will not abandon them; all will return home safely. Have no fear! God is with them and lead them safely home.
- ▶ God will save them and all nature will give testimony to God's power.
- ▶ In Biblical parlance when nature erupts in signs it is associated with the advent of the great royal dynasty and the arrival of the Messiah.
- ▶ All will be blessed. The refugees will be strengthened, planted firmly on the land and there will be no need to fear.
- ▶ All will return to Israel rejoicing because God acted definitively on their behalf.
- ▶ This passage reflects the hope for a return to the peace of Eden in the last age.
- ▶ The people of Israel believed that in the last age (the final eschaton) God would restore the peace intended for the world at the creation of the world.
- ▶ The lion would lay with the lamb; there would be no more wars or rumors of war, all would live in perfect peace and harmony toward one another, toward God's creation



- ▶ and toward God's anawim (poor little ones) and the messianic age would be inaugurated.
- ▶ Christians appropriated hopes for this messianic age to be fulfilled with the arrival of the Christ as evidenced by today's Gospel in which Jesus tells his disciples to go to the prison and tell John that everything that had been prophesied about the Messiah was coming to pass in Jesus himself.
- ▶ Jesus was the perfect realization of their Messianic hopes and dreams.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ How can this reading be a word for you today?
- ▶ Imagine you are in the throes of despair—you feel as though you are in exile in a foreign place and that God has abandoned you. How important would it be for you to have a prophet such as Isaiah encourage you? What does it say to you about God's role in your life?
- ▶ Isaiah looks toward the future idealized restoration of the Garden of Eden. What does it do to your faith that the peace that was to be associated with the End of Days has yet to be realized? What would you say to those who would tell you that Jesus cannot be the Christ because we still are dealing with wars and disharmony in our world?

(Catechist: be sure at some point to make the point that in God's kingdom that peace has been realized. Whenever two or more are gathered in Jesus' name and living the Gospel he preached, the harmony of Eden is restored.)

- ▶ In what way does this reading speak to us of contemporary Advent joy? In what way does it prepare us and invite us more deeply into the mystery of the Incarnation?
- ▶ The people of ancient Israel were in captivity and desperately in need of a Messiah. It is clear to see. Why do you need a Messiah? Where is salvation needed in your life?
- ▶ In what way have you experienced the kingdom of God Christ came to establish in your own Christian community? What are some obvious obstacles to the promotion of that kingdom?

## Second Reading: James 5:7-10

- ▶ The letter of James, written probably near the year sixty and certainly before the destruction of the Temple in the year seventy, is a moral instruction (called a paranesis).
- ▶ Tradition always maintained that James was the brother of Jesus. Many Biblical scholars disagree with that belief since the text seems to be written after his death and employs literary tools used at a later time.

- ▶ James' insists that faith must be put into constant practice. It is not a cerebral exercise or theory, but a lived reality.
- ▶ James exhorts those who are poor and those who suffer to patiently endure and bear their trials unwaveringly.
- ▶ James insisted that people pray and turn their eyes toward God as they await the Lord's return.
- ▶ James looks to the future day of the Lord's return and final judgment.
- ▶ One constant theme of Advent is that the reign of God is both now and yet to come. James seems to echo that theme.
- ▶ This reminds us of Advent's celebration of the three comings of Christ—the Christ who came in history, the Christ who comes in our lives today and the Christ will come again at the end of the world.
- ▶ Yes we are to celebrate and be joyful but always within the context of the watchful sentinel who stands guard lest invaders come and ransack the watchtower.
- ▶ James challenged his community to wait patiently for the Lord's return. They were to look to the prophets of old for an example of long-suffering and patient endurance.
- ▶ The prophets proclaimed God's word as God had instructed them and then waited patiently for God to be faithful to that word. James' disciples were to be as diligent and patient as the Old Testament prophets. God would bring all things to fulfillment.
- ▶ Patience is a virtue sorely needed in our modern culture. Patience begets hope which begets faith in God's promise to save us through his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life.

- ▶ Where is the good news in this reading?
- ▶ When you consider the trials in your life, how patiently (or not) do you endure them? What is James' message for you in light of your present trials?
- ▶ What does James' exhortation to those who patiently wait for the Lord's return have to teach us today in our modern culture? In what way if any, is this a relevant word for us today?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about waiting? Why is waiting good for the soul? Have you ever experienced waiting that was good for your soul?
- ▶ What would you change about your life if you discovered that Jesus was returning tomorrow?

## Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

### Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ Consider for a moment. John is sitting in prison. He had to know that his preaching would land him in jail, yet still he preached the truth.
- ▶ John is abandoned by his friends. Perhaps he was questioning his ministry. Could he have been wrong? He was, after all, a principal actor at Jesus' baptism, yet still he asked if Jesus was the long awaited messiah. Did he miss something? Why did he have to ask if Jesus was the *One*? Was he, like the others, expecting a warrior Messiah?
- ▶ Jesus lets John stew in his doubts. He invited personal conversion just as he does in every encounter—just as he does with us.
- ▶ Jesus told John to look at the observable signs—the miracles that were to usher in the last days—the biblical promises that the blind would see, the deaf would hear, the lame would walk, the dead would be raised and the poor would be preached the Good News--were fulfilled in real time—now and in that very place.
- ▶ How dare John even allude to missing it!
- ▶ John knew the Scriptures. He knew what was to accompany salvation's inauguration and he stood on the stage as a principle actor in the drama. This was not rocket science; it was as plain as the nose on John's face—yet there must have been enough ambiguity present in the situation that even something that *plain* required a response of faith.
- ▶ John's situation reminds us of the challenges of faith. We too can miss the kingdom right in front of us if we fail to read the signs. God gives us signs, but inherent in those signs is enough ambiguity that we are forced to accept a certain amount of what we see and what we cannot see on faith. This is God's way to help us grow in faith.
- ▶ This Gospel is a clarion call to us to consider the signs in our contemporary world. What are signs of the kingdom right under our noses?
- ▶ Jesus' miracles did not help John. John was still executed.
- ▶ John foreshadowed the salvific mission of Christ and the fate of all prophets. John prepared us for the road Christ would take and the road each of us would be invited to embark upon-- the road of paradoxes.
- ▶ Prophets who walk that road discover that God can be slow to act and can allow his prophets to suffer to the extreme. Prophets who walk that road discover that strength is found in weakness and the prophet wins by losing and lives by dying.
- ▶ John's jail-cell question perhaps fast-forwards the reader to a future anguish put on the lips of Christ in his query before God from the cross: "Why have you abandoned me?"

- ▶ Jesus heard John's need for assurance and answered him. Jesus heard John's prayer—the prayer of a faithful servant of God awaiting his execution and eternal glory with God.
- ▶ It is important to note that we have no way of knowing for sure what was on John's mind. Speculation, however, invites us to consider all the possibilities that will in turn increase our faith and ease our doubts as we struggle with similar questions throughout our life.
- ▶ “If John had doubts, is it no wonder that I too have them?”
- ▶ It is important to note that Matthew is not concerned with writing an historical account of the encounter between John and Jesus. If that had been his agenda he would have followed through with John's response to Jesus.
- ▶ Matthew's primary concern is to focus on Jesus' response to the question. Period.
- ▶ John was asking his question as a Jew, not as a prophet. He represented the people of Israel as evidenced by the phrase “...or should *we* look for another?” He was asking on behalf of the Jewish people.
- ▶ Matthew responds by telling John that in order to truly appreciate the truth that Christ was the long awaited Messiah, the people must appreciate the Gospel he preached. He preached the advent of the kingdom first by his preaching and second by the works he performed.
- ▶ Israel expected a different kind of king/Messiah. God had other plans for the salvation he promised and it would be fulfilled by sending his son Jesus Christ to preach the kingdom, to perform signs of the advent of the kingdom and to complete his mission through his sacrificial death and resurrection.
- ▶ Jesus' words would have challenged the cultural norms of the day. No wonder many missed who he was and what he came to accomplish.
- ▶ He was boastful, for heaven's sakes! In that extremely shame based culture boasting was a serious infraction. People of that time were required by societal norms to avoid boasting and compliments so as to avoid seeking honor that could and perhaps should rightfully belong to another.
- ▶ Jesus asserted his God-given authority with the beatitude that blessed those who were not offended by Jesus' rightful claim to honor (as God's Son).
- ▶ Jesus' assertive word seeks to lay to rest the critiques leveled against his mission.
- ▶ Matthew affirms Jesus' authority. God is inaugurating the promised kingdom of God through the life and mission of his Son, Jesus Christ.
- ▶ In that kingdom yes, the blind will see, of course the lame shall walk and the deaf shall hear, but ultimately God's heart for the poor takes center stage.
- ▶ God's kingdom renews the covenant God forged at the creation of the world in which all creation existed in harmony. In that first kingdom the people were to love the Lord their God with heart, mind and soul. They were to love one another as they loved themselves. God would be their God and they would be God's people. God would protect them and care for them. The people, in response were to care for those who could not care for themselves—God's anawim (the poor ones)—illustrating God's preferential option for the poor.
- ▶ God's kingdom was to be a safe haven for the poor.
- ▶ The question posed by this Gospel is universal and spans the ages.



- ▶ “Will you accept the kingdom or reject it?”
- ▶ The question is as relevant today as it was then.
- ▶ Do the poor have the Good News preached to them where you live?
- ▶ If yes is your answer, then the kingdom of God is in your midst. Rejoice and be glad.
- ▶ If not you have work to do.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ What are some signs of the kingdom of God in your midst that you might have missed?
- ▶ When it comes to God and things of God there is always enough ambiguity present in every miracle or sign from God that requires faith on the part of the believer. Has God ever acted in your life and you recognized it as God’s action, yet still within the situation itself there was enough uncertainty that you found yourself struggling with doubt (i.e. “Was that really God or was it my imagination”)? What does that teach us about God’s relationship with us? What are the implications? Can you see in that event the way in which your faith has been tested and developed? Could there have been an easier way? Why do you suppose God is not more direct with us?
- ▶ Imagine you are John. Jesus was healing people and performing all kinds of miracles and yet does not rescue John from execution. What is the lesson in that situation? What does it teach us about God?
- ▶ What does John teach us about the role of prophets?
- ▶ What way, if any, can you relate to the statement that prophets discover that God can be slow to act, can allow his prophets to suffer to the extreme and that strength can be found in weakness and one wins by losing and lives by dying? What do those truths mean to you and what do they have to do with your life?
- ▶ What do those prophetic truths teach us about the Christian life and our relationship with God?
- ▶ What steps might you take this Advent season to become more aware and participate in the life of Christ who lives within, the Christ who is to come anew at Christmas and the Christ who is to come at the end of the world? What are the implications of this Gospel? What is the challenge?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today’s liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God’s call?

## CONCLUDING PRAYER

### Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you Lord as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.

OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

## APPENDIX

#1. There have been many times in my life that I have felt like the ancient exiles, wondering if God had all but abandoned us. I have the benefit of Isaiah's encouraging words speaking to me from ancient ages, but I have also been privileged to have prophets of hope from the Christian community to constantly remind me that God does not abandon us.

One reason Christianity and Judaism place such importance on the act of remembering God's saving deeds is because it is in the remembering that God's salvation becomes present to each generation. When I remember the great things God has done for past generations, I am strengthened to know that God will act similarly for me if I have the faith to believe that he will.

When I remember the marvels God has accomplished in my life at other times in my life, I am sustained and strengthened to wait for God to act in the present.

Whenever I am tempted to cave in to despair I recall a defining event in which I gave my son-in-law a precious family relic of the martyred saint St. Maria Goretti before he left for Afghanistan. My mother had a deep devotion for Maria Goretti. I told my son-in-law that we would pray for her intercession while he was away in hopes that God would keep him safe.

We had no idea when our son-in-law would return home. After a year and a half my daughter received a phone call from him. "I cannot tell you the exact date for security reasons, but count back nine days from your brother's birthday. I will be returning home on that day." Nine days from her brother's birthday was July 6, the Feast of St. Maria Goretti.

What that miraculous event communicated to our family is that God had not abandoned us, no matter how it might have seemed at times that he had. Whenever I am tempted to believe that God has turned a deaf ear I remember the exhilaration of that event and the *Gaudete Joy* it generated for my family. I remember how it felt to know that God had fulfilled our hopes and dreams. And indeed God did hear our prayers and our son-in-law returned home safely.

God acts and we are to remember those acts in order to sustain us in future times of expectant waiting. God acted definitively in the Exodus event. Israel was called upon to remember that great saving event and be confident that God would act again on their behalf. Prophets remind us to remember.

#2. Several situations in my life point to the truth that God can be slow to act and that strength is found in weakness and that we win by losing and live by dying. My professional life proceeds forward unfettered. Life is good in that department. Perhaps my ministerial life is effective because my personal life embodies the aforementioned truth—in my personal life God is slow to act; I am only strong when God strengthens my

weakness. I lose every day when dealing with one issue in particular, yet in that losing I learn more about who God is and how God acts in my life. Through the daily process of dying, I have learned what is important and what is not—I have learned how to live. Rejoice and be glad!

The two issues that have forged me in the fire of late are the mental illness of my child and my own health issues. I have learned what true powerlessness means—what it means to abandon my life to God—what it means to wait for God to act.

My ministry is effective because of the dying that has made me into an empty vessel waiting to be filled with God's power, God's wisdom and God's solutions to life's challenges.

***Waiting.*** It seems as though that is all I do—wait for God to act. I wait for God to heal my child. Yet God is slow to act. Mental illness does not come with an instruction manual. I have been forced to love in ways that are unimaginable—ways that stretch the human being to capacity—ways that could have only been taught through the crucible of dealing with the absurdity of this illness on a day to day basis. And so I wait. Yet even in the absurdity of this illness I see God's presence through a thin veil. There are times when God's wisdom speaks so profoundly through him that I am taken aback. God wants me to know that he resides within him—no matter how crazy he is at that moment. Rejoice and be glad!

My health situation also requires waiting. For some reason it is a lot easier to abandon my life to God's care when it comes to myself, it is another matter to similarly abandon my son's life to his care. God's track record has been slow and not very successful over the twelve years we have waited.

However, the gift of this illness is the way in which it forces me to grow, to ask for God's help, to trust that he will give it, to rely on the strength and the power of the Christian community to uphold me as I wait and to live in hope that there will be a better day—that is the hope of the Christian life. Patient waiting begets hope which begets an increase in faith. I trust that God will act in God's own time. The Israelites trusted that God would act and deliver them out of exile. God acted. The world waited for a Messiah and God sent his Son. God acted. Rejoice and be glad.

O ye of little faith! Why should I doubt? I need only wait for God to act and trust that he will. Rejoice and be glad.





## Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Cross and Paschal Mystery  
Kingdom of God  
Soteriology/Salvation  
Anointing of the Sick  
Incarnation

Kingdom of God  
Liturgical Year  
Advent Overview  
Eschatology or the End Times:  
Heaven, Hell and Purgatory

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

### **CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY**

John the Baptist was a disciple par excellence. He truly knew the price of faithful discipleship. Like all prophets he died in service of the word he came to preach. We are all baptized priest, prophet and king. Thus we too are prophets. We, like John the Baptist are called to offer our lives in service of the Gospel. Advent & Christmas serve as a bookend for the Paschal Mystery. Advent/Christmas looks forward to the culmination of salvation history in the Christ event that we celebrate in the Lent/Easter sequence. Thus today would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY.

### **SOTERIOLOGY/SALVATION**

We are getting closer to the culmination of the most defining moment in salvation history—the Incarnation of Christ. John the Baptist heralded the coming of the Messiah who would usher in God's ultimate saving plan. Today's liturgy is an invitation to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about SOTERIOLOGY/SALVATION

### **ANOINTING OF THE SICK**

A sign of the kingdom Christ came to preach is the Good News preached to the poor and the blind that will see and the sick who are healed. That kingdom promise continues in the sacraments of the Church. John preached Christ and the kingdom heralded the inauguration of the end of time. Healing is a hallmark of those last days. We are beneficiaries of the kingdom. Thus, today's doctrinal session will focus on the SACRAMENT OF ANOINTING OF THE SICK.

## **KINGDOM OF GOD**

Christ came to restore the harmony of Eden. John the Baptist came to herald Christ. The Baptist preached repentance in preparation for his coming. Advent is a time we imagine that kingdom in which the lion will lay with the lamb and the peace and harmony of the Garden will be restored. Jesus re-established that kingdom and promised that we are living in its reality. When two or more are gathered in his name that kingdom is established. Advent is an appropriate opportunity to focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about the establishment of the KINGDOM OF GOD.

## **LITURGICAL YEAR**

We have just begun to celebrate a new liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ unfolds throughout the coming year. It is most appropriate that during the season of Advent we focus our attention on what the Church celebrates in the LITURGICAL YEAR.

## **INCARNATION**

Advent prepares for the Incarnation of Christ. Tradition considers the Incarnation to include the entire mystery of Christ—much like the Paschal Mystery. The season of Advent /Christmas heralds, exalts and proclaims the Incarnation. Without it, there would be no death and resurrection and thus, no salvation. The Incarnation is the primary integral event in human history. Advent is an appropriate time to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the INCARNATION.

## **ADVENT OVERVIEW**

Advent is a season that prepares for Christmas. Advent is considered in tandem with Christmas. The season does not stand alone. Today we will focus our attention on what we celebrate in this very important season that prepares for the Incarnation of Christ. Thus, our doctrinal session today will focus on the OVERVIEW OF ADVENT.

## **ESCHATOLOGY or END TIMES and HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.**

The Scriptures of Advent are alive with cosmic images of last days and end times. Advent is an appropriate time to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about last things. Thus, today our doctrinal session will address ESCHATOLOGY or END TIMES and HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.